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Letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to enclose herewith the concept note for the Security Council debate on the theme "Maintenance of international peace and security: comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa", to be held on 25 June 2018 in the Security Council, under the presidency of the Russian Federation (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Vassily **Nebenzia**

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Annex to the letter dated 1 June 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Concept note for the Security Council debate on the theme "Maintenance of international peace and security: comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa"

I. Introduction

1. The Russian Federation proposes holding on 25 June 2018 a Security Council debate on the theme "Maintaining international peace and security: comprehensive review of the situation in the Middle East and North Africa" with the aim of considering the root causes of the conflicts in the Middle East from a wider perspective and examining ways to tackle those root causes jointly.

II. Situational context

2. Conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa have had a profound destabilizing impact not only on the military and political situation in the region, but also on international relations in general. Old crises are still present while new ones are proliferating. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to be at the core of the turbulence that has swept the region. Its optimal settlement will be through a two-State solution on the basis of relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the Arab Peace Initiative. The intermediary role of the Middle East Quartet, as an institution endorsed in Security Council resolutions, remains unique. Wars in the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen await resolution. Additional international efforts are needed to rectify the situation in Libya and to help to restore Iraq. The escalation of tensions around the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region does not contribute to improving the overall situation. These conflicts and problems have led to the spread of terrorists, who are resorting to weapons of mass destruction, especially chemical agents. They have also led to the intensification of illegal arms trafficking and an increase in the number of refugees. The presence of illegal armed groups in hotspots has become a widespread reality.

3. The ethnic and religious balance that existed for centuries has been deeply disturbed. This concerns not only thousands of Christians who have been forced to leave the Middle East, but also Kurds, especially the Yazidi Kurds, and other ethnic and religious minorities. Moreover, as a result of conflict, many representatives of the largest Sunni community in the region have felt unprotected.

4. The settlement of conflicts is hindered by the fact that unilateral actions, often not backed by any legitimate reasons, are coming to the forefront. They undermine confidence between States and damage the reputation of the United Nations and the Security Council.

5. All these factors pose a threat to international peace and security, inter-civilizational dialogue, and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and, therefore, require an urgent response. Of course, the response must be provided on a strictly legal basis and within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations. Actions to circumvent international law only strengthen the sources of conflict and undermine prospects for the advancement of political processes, acting as a time bomb for the future unity, territorial integrity and independence of States.

III. Objectives

6. To prepare responses to threats to international peace and security, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the nature of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. It must be acknowledged that attempts to deal with conflicts separately, without taking into account the common regional and historical context, are useless. The results of ignoring that fact are known. Modern reality dictates the need for a comprehensive approach and the development of unified rules of the game for external players.

7. A wider look at the problems in the region could help to highlight the main factors that characterize the present situation in the Middle East and North Africa, and to identify the additional risks to peace efforts posed by interference in the internal affairs of States, the use of force in violation of international law and that bypasses the Security Council, and the supply of weapons to non-State groups and groups that adhere to radical ideologies. It is important to reaffirm the commitment to the supremacy of international law and the rejection of military approaches to resolving crises.

8. Understanding the root causes of the spiral of instability in the region will make it possible to maintain necessary focus on genuinely collective work, in which the Security Council should have a key role.

9. Only consistent and collective efforts on the part of the international community, on the basis of respect for the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity and the rejection of double standards, can bring us closer to the desired normalization of the situation in the region. Any unilateral action is detrimental. What is really needed are coordinated approaches that are sealed by decisions of the Security Council. Cooperation should rest upon respect for the cultural and civilizational diversity of the modern world and the democratization of international relations.

10. The logic of mutually respectful and constructive collective work inevitably leads to the need to develop a common, unifying, non-confrontational agenda for the Security Council. Its elements could include the following actions:

(a) The formation of a genuinely global front against terrorism and all its manifestations, with an emphasis on supporting the legitimate Governments of States that are combating terrorism on their territory.

(b) The refusal to resolve conflicts by force and the intensification of peace efforts, including through support for the good offices of the Secretary-General, regional organizations and Member States with respect to various Middle Eastern issues. This has particular relevance to the long-standing stalemate in Palestinian-Israeli affairs, which plays a powerful role in fuelling radical sentiments. Progress on this track would serve as an important contribution to ensuring regional stability and security for those who live in the region.

(c) The provision of targeted assistance for the preservation and development of strong, stable and capable State institutions, including security structures.

(d) A review of the sanctions policy of the Security Council, along with the rejection of unilateral sanctions and embargoes, which usually become an instrument of collective punishment and an obstacle in the way of achieving peace.

(e) The strengthening of existing measures and the development of new measures that help to build confidence in the triangle comprising Arab States, Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran. An initiative to launch a regional dialogue with the participation of external players, similar to the Helsinki Process that took place in

Europe in the 1970s, should be considered. The Arab Peace Initiative and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear programme retain constructive potential.

(f) The concentration of international efforts on combating chemical terrorism without politicization and on the basis of objectivity, impartiality and professionalism, which, inter alia, implies the improvement of the international legal framework for countering terrorism involving weapons of mass destruction.

(g) The promotion of an interfaith and inter-ethnic culture of peace at the national, regional and international levels, including the protection of religious and ethnic minorities, as well as of places and objects of cultural and religious significance.

(h) The refusal to politicize humanitarian work. Efforts to address problems relating to internally displaced persons, refugees, migrants, the restoration of infrastructure, and the provision of assistance to the States of the region should not be selective.

(i) The promotion of the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and other types of weapons of mass destruction.

11. An honest and unbiased partnership with respect to all the above-mentioned areas would help to contain destabilizing tendencies in the Middle East and North Africa and throughout the world, leaving dialogue as the only tool for resolving disagreements.

IV. Guiding questions

12. The following questions are proposed for discussion:

(a) What factors generate the potential for conflict in the Middle East and North Africa?

(b) Why does the policy of taking unilateral steps prevail over measures of a collective nature approved by the United Nations?

(c) How can the inviolability of the key principles of national sovereignty, territorial integrity and the unity of States be further protected? How can the extralegal designation of "regimes that need to be changed" be prevented?

(d) On what basis would it be possible to jointly continue the process of reinforcing established collective security mechanisms and developing new regional systems on the basis of the principle of the commonality and indivisibility of security?

(e) What is needed to truly unite the efforts of all States in the fight against the threat of terrorism, including the use of chemical weapons by terrorists? What additional measures need to be taken to fight the financing of terrorism and to undercut the efforts of terrorists to spread their ideologies?

(f) Why has the tendency towards division become so profound in communities where peoples of diverse ethnical and religious backgrounds had coexisted peacefully for centuries? How does this threaten the future of the region?

(g) What needs to be done to prevent the shift in the nature of conflict in the region from being based in politics to being based in religion? What is needed to provide for the safety of religious and ethnical minorities?

V. Expected results

13. The Russian Federation expects an open and unbiased dialogue on the above-mentioned questions, which will allow participants to reach common ground with respect to the development of collective approaches to the settlement of conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa.